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ABSTRACT

This study is a "teaching case." It is a description of events written to help education students understand the complex, ambiguous situations that arise in rural teaching. The limitations of scientific rules and principles for teacher training are especially obvious in rural Alaska schools--where teachers who are typically Caucasian instruct children from Eskimo or Indian communities. Teachers in a culturally-different community must decide to what extent they should participate in community affairs, how they should respond to various community factions, and to what extent they should accept or attempt to alter the situations in which they find themselves. In recounting of actual events, an experienced teacher arrives in a small Eskimo community, in which difficult social problems, such as alcoholism, exist. The teacher is a veteran of rural Alaska--known throughout the region for his success in establishing positive, cooperative relationships with village students and adults. The case describes what he did, how he did it, and the toll it took on his family of six. The story emphasizes his sensitivity toward the villagers and their way of life. (KS)

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THE TEACHER WHO CAME TO RIVERTOWN:

A CASE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

The Teacher Who Came to Rivertown describes what happens when a new teacher arrives in a small Eskimo community with difficult social problems. The teacher is a veteran of rural Alaska -- known throughout the region for his success in establishing positive, cooperative relationships with village students and adults. The case describes what he did and how he did it and what happened in the end.

The Teacher Who Came to Rivertown is not simply a narrative, one teacher's story. Nor is it an ethnographic case study, a rich careful description of a cultural scene.

This story is a "teaching case." It is a description of events written to help students understand the complex, ambiguous situations which arise in rural teaching. Teaching cases have long been a cornerstone of professional preparation in schools of business and law. Only recently has the field of education begun to explore their value in the preparation of teachers (Doyle, 1986; Shulman, 1987; McCarthy, 1987). In the teaching case, interpretations are left open and loose ends are not tied up. Relevant information is not known, and known information is not always relevant. The teaching case lets red herrings swim and demands speculation from inadequate knowledge. The purpose of the case is not to establish "truth" but to prepare students for "wise action" (Christensen, 1987). Professional practice demands wise action, even where the truth is not known.

Purposes of Teaching Cases

Teaching cases are useful when the purpose of instruction is not to communicate facts, information, rules, and fixed principles but rather to develop "qualities of mind (curiosity, judgment, wisdom), qualities of person (character, sensitivity, integrity, responsibility), and the ability to apply general concepts and knowledge to specific situations" (Christensen, 1987).

As Donald Schon (1983) observes, professionals often practice in situations which demand more than the application of technical knowledge to concrete problems. Professionals typically work in situations of complexity, ambiguity, and disorder where it is not clear what goals are desirable or where desirable goals may conflict. The professional's task is not simply to solve particular problems through the application of technical knowledge. The task is also to figure out just what the problems are. Preparation for professional practice should include preparation in spotting issues and framing problems, in thinking through the consequences and risks of different courses of action, and in staying sensitive to the particulars of concrete situations.

In the field of education, the very success of recent efforts to identify a "scientific basis for teaching" -- research-based technical knowledge that teachers can apply to children and classrooms -- has brought to light the inherent limitations of scientific knowledge in resolving the subtle dilemmas of classroom life. The rules and principles derived from educational research are useful, but the technical knowledge that can be gleaned from scientific research will always be too limited and too general to encompass classroom life.

The limitations of scientific rules and principles are especially obvious in rural Alaska schools -- where teachers who are typically Caucasian instruct children from Eskimo or Indian communities. Not only must teachers decide whether research-based knowledge derived from mainstream educational situations applies to small cross-cultural classrooms. They must also think through a myriad of teaching issues beyond the classroom -- how they should live their lives in a small rural community, to what extent they should participate in community affairs, how they should respond to various community factions, to what extent they should accept or attempt to alter the situations in which they find themselves.

Teaching well in small Eskimo and Indian communities requires far more than learning a body of cultural knowledge in addition to pedagogical knowledge. Anthropological research concerning Eskimo and Indian communities is similarly over-generalized, fragmentary and inexact. Rural communities, even within the same cultural region, are different from each other, and communities are changing in unpredictable ways. Different generations and particular families within the same community have different beliefs, expectations, values, and styles of communication. Teachers can expect no rules or recipes. They must learn from the situation.

A major purpose of these teaching cases is to develop students' sensitivity to the situation -- to the ambiguities and multiple realities of village teaching. We want students to feel more comfortable with uncertainty. We want them to think about other people's interpretations of a situation. We want to enlarge their repertoire of potential strategies for dealing with problems. We want them to be better able to anticipate the ramifications and risks of the actions they may choose.

Teaching cases not only help to develop cognitive capacities -- judgment and insight. The cases also offer emotional preparation for dealing with an unjust and uncertain world. Young teachers tend to expect a just and certain world, a world in which good teaching is always rewarded and good teachers do not bear the legacy of a past they did not create. The cases help students become aware that these expectations are not entirely reasonable and that people like themselves can become caught in circumstances not of their making.

Representativeness of Teaching Cases and the Author's Point-of-View

The Teacher Who Came to Rivertown is one of a series of teaching cases written for education students by teachers who have observed or participated in the events they describe. This case was NOT selected because it is "representative" of teaching situations in rural Alaska. It was selected because it presented in a concrete and dramatic way an especially difficult teaching situation that students would benefit from reflecting upon.

The author of this case is a non-Native person who grew up in the region and observed the events described. The case is based in large part on lengthy interviews with the teacher and his wife, students, and other members of the community and on observations over a period of two years. The author's identity, as well as the identity of the community and teaching staff, have been disguised.

In preparing these cases, we have wrestled with the vexing issue of point-of-view. The author's viewpoint is the perspective of a non-Native observer. While the author tries to describe community points-of-view, the author cannot represent a Yup'ik perspective. This situation, of course, mirrors the situation of the teachers we are preparing. We are all imprisoned in our own skins. In case discussions, students should deal directly with the issue of whose perspective governs the narrative. They should consider the way the situation might look to community members -- keeping in mind that people in a Yup'ik community, like any other community, do not necessarily hold the same viewpoint.

Questions To Focus Discussion of a Case

Teaching cases such as this one are intended to develop students' abilities to 1) spot issues and frame problems in an ambiguous, complex teaching situation, 2) interpret the situation from different perspectives, 3) identify crucial decision-points and possibilities for action, and 4) recognize the possible consequences of alternative actions. In stimulating such reflection, we have found useful the following general kinds of questions. Most have been culled from the Instructor's Guide to Teaching and the Case Method (Christensen, Hansen, and Moore, 1987) and from discussions about case method teaching (Christensen, 1987).

These questions are:

1. What are the central issues in this situation? Which are most urgent? Which are most critical?

2. What, if anything, should anyone do? Who? When? How? Why do you think so?

3. What did the teacher actually do? With what results? At what risk? With what potential long-term consequences?

4. How does this situation appear to other participants -- such as the students, superintendent, parents, village council? Why do you think so?

5. How did this situation develop? What, if anything, might alter the basic conditions which created the present difficulties?

6. What, if anything, have you learned from this case?

In teaching a case, we typically ask students to prepare for class discussion by writing a two-page paper a) outlining what they see as the main issues in the situation, b) describing the actions the teacher took, and c) appraising the teacher's actions. We begin the class by asking each student to identify the most important issues of the case and we list the issues on the chalkboard. We choose as a starting point for discussion an issue many students have identified as key to understanding the case. After the case discussion, we ask students to write another short paper on what they now see as the fundamental issues of the case, what actions they would have advised the teacher to take, and what they have learned or come to appreciate as a result of the case discussion.

Issues Raised in The Teacher Who Came to Rivertown

Since an important goal of case discussion is to develop students' abilities to spot issues, we do not want to identify in this introduction the crucial issues in this case. We point out only that much profitable discussion centers around the issue of what an outside teacher can accomplish in this particular kind of community. The contrast in viewpoints between the central teacher in the case and other teachers who come to the school also offers rich possibilities for analysis.

The Teacher Who Came to Rivertown is a chronological narrative. It may be useful to ask students to read the account of the first year in Rivertown, which ends at the section "The New Teacher Arrives and the School Year Begins" and then to predict what will happen. Students can then test their understanding of the situation by seeing if their predictions are correct.

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ARRIVAL

One month before school was to begin, the new high school teacher arrived in Rivertown. His early arrival was unusual. Often teachers report in at remote Alaskan village sites a few days before school starts. Bob Perthell makes it a practice to arrive at least two weeks early. He likes to have enough time to get a sense of a place and its people before assuming his official teaching role. In addition, Bob enjoys many of the outdoor activities rural Alaska has to offer. "I'd taught at two other villages in the region and knew that Rivertown was locally famous for its trout fishing," he relates. "I wanted to get in on some of the action!"

On July 15, Bob and Betty Perthell and their four children stepped out of a chartered Cessna 206 onto Rivertown's 3000-foot gravel airstrip. An attractive couple in their forties, Bob and Betty had expected a group of villagers to meet the plane as is customary in many small Alaska communities. This time only a few dogs sauntered over to greet them. The village appeared deserted, and darkening skies threatened rain within the hour. This was not the reception the family had hoped for, but they didn't have time to dwell on their disappointment -- the pilot was in a hurry to get back. The weather on the flight over had been marginal, and he wanted to leave before it deteriorated much further. Quickly, the Perthells helped unload their sleeping bags, backpacks, and small supply of food from the plane. The pilot was back in the cockpit within 10 minutes of landing. He stuck his head out the plane window and called out a promise to return the next day -- or as soon as weather permitted -- with their remaining supplies.

It began to drizzle as the family clustered together on the runway to wave the pilot good journey. The plane had hardly lifted off the ground before the Perthells turned to the task of moving their gear. Bob had been to Rivertown once before on a school trip from another village and remembered that the house they had arranged to rent was located on a path just beyond the school. Everyone except the baby grabbed something to carry and the family trudged up the hillside trail to a small, unpainted frame structure. It was locked. They searched thoroughly but found no key. With the rain starting, they decided to store their belongings under the building before looking further.

The house stood on large wooden posts protruding vertically from the ground. Bob made a mental note to enclose the open area under the house before winter came. He knew a house on pilings would have a cold floor if not skirted. For the moment, he was glad of the easy access to dry ground. He found a stack of shipping pallets nearby and laid two of them side by side on the hard packed clay under the house. He stacked their things on top; the house's floor served as a roof. Bob and his family crawled under the house. "Home Sweet Home," Betty pronounced wryly.

Their belongings secure, the Perthells decided to start down the trail and continue searching for the key. An old man dressed in worn khakis walked out of the willows behind the house.

The Perthells introduced themselves and explained that they were the new teachers and needed the key. The old man, Petluska, listened with interest and promised he would try to find either the janitor or someone who had an extra key. With a quick nod, he descended the hillside trail.

The drizzle turned to steady rain. The family decided to take shelter under the building and wait for the janitor. They sat on top of their belongings and shared the tuna fish sandwiches and orange sodas they had brought with them. Bob and Betty wished for a thermos of hot coffee. Their nine-year-old twins, undaunted by the weather, set out to explore their new home. The tall grass along the footpaths made wonderful wet hideaways.

Despite wool sweaters and socks, Bob and Betty and five-year-old Mary Dee were chilled. Six-months-old Louisa fussed and fretted until Betty fed her and put her to sleep in a cardboard box lined with a sleeping bag. Mary Dee alternately complained and played with the few toys they had brought until she, too, fell asleep.

After a time, even the twins, Danny and Frankie, complained of cold and boredom. Bob set them to work collecting firewood from the beach. By the time the janitor walked into the clearing around the house, (four hours from the time the Perthells had landed), they had a campfire going beside the building and a rather cozy circle of assorted driftwood log "chairs" surrounding it.

Sam, the janitor, was a trim, dark man of about 35. His coarse, black hair was short and freshly barbered. Unlike Mr. Petluska, Sam was quite talkative. He apologized for their long wait. Almost the entire village, he explained, had spent the day across the river at the cemetery, commemorating the death one year before of a young man who had been killed by his uncle in a drunken dispute. Sam explained that after the church ceremony, it is traditional for the deceased person's family to serve a feast to all in attendance. Most people linger to comfort the family and talk. The ritual often lasts all day. Mr. Petluska was waiting for him when he got back home, and he came right over.

Sam expressed surprise at their early arrival: "We didn't know you were coming, the teachers never come until right before school starts. If we'd known you were coming -- hey, you should've gone knocking at doors until you found someone at home. Some of the old people didn't go -- somebody would've let you in to warm up. Gee, but the teachers never come this early."

Sam sprung the padlock on the porch door clasp. He took two steps forward and used another key on the house door. Bob, and then the rest of the family, followed him into the building. The house seemed even smaller

than Bob remembered. His family of six would share two bedrooms -- about ten feet by ten feet each. The house had a small bathroom/utility room. A tattered couch separated an efficiency kitchenette from the "living room." As the janitor said, they had not been expected -- the floor was marked with dried mud footprints. The odor of stove oil mingled with the mustiness of a room unaired for weeks. Mice had left trails in cupboards and along the counter top. The family surveyed their new home and said nothing.

"Gee, you're lucky to have a washer," Sam commented. "And electricity -- the rest of the village is supposed to be getting it next year."

"I'll have to hook up the oil stove," Sam said. "I'll do that right now." He walked out the door.

The family began cleaning up. They decided to concentrate on one bedroom since it was so late. They would all sleep there, on the bed and the floor. In the middle of their preparations, Sam returned. He lit the stove, staying long enough to ensure that it was working. The building heated up quickly. Just as Bob and Betty were settling the three oldest kids into sleeping bags on the floor for the night, there was a knock on the door.

A pretty, dark-haired girl of about 10 years of age stood on the porch. "My dad told me to bring this to you," she blurted and, handing him a brown paper bag, ran down the stairs.

Bob opened the bag and the aroma of fresh bread wafted into the air. The Perthells sat on the floor in the bedroom and passed around the sack of golden, doughnut-shaped Native fried bread as they sipped a bedtime cup of hot chocolate. They had arrived.

TEACHER TURNOVER IN RIVERTOWN

The year before the Perthells arrived, another teacher and his family had come to assume teaching positions in Rivertown. After landing, they had made their way along the path to the school. The path opened onto a playground area. Several children were climbing on the jungle gym bars, laughing and shouting loudly. As the teacher started to walk over to the children, he detected movement to his right. A closer look revealed a man and a woman lying on the shaded, sandy ground under the slide. The teacher turned to intercept his family before they approached. The children on the playground equipment had stopped to look in the direction of the slide. Then they all resumed playing. The teacher walked his family back to the airstrip. They got on the plane and asked the pilot to fly them back. The villagers never knew they had lost a teacher before school had even started.

Accounts of such incidents have reached the state-wide teacher grapevine, and Rivertown has acquired a reputation among teachers around the state as a difficult village to live and teach in. Teachers realize that the village is plagued by severe alcohol abuse and the problems that accompany it. The area-wide health board reported that 10 percent of the Rivertown population have died of alcohol-related deaths in the last two years; the community has the highest alcohol-related death rate in the region. Rivertown is not considered a desirable teaching position.

Many of the people who have taught in Rivertown come from outside the state. There have been years when three months was the average teaching term. In the past few years, the high turnover rate appears to have stabilized. Bob Perthell replaced a teacher who had stayed three years. He would be joined by another new teacher, but this teacher was following a teacher who had stayed two years.

In addition to frustration with the alcohol abuse, departing teachers cited a variety of reasons for leaving. Along with many village teachers, they missed being close to family and friends. They were concerned about the lack of medical facilities. They bemoaned substandard living conditions and high transportation costs. They missed being able to go out for dinner and a movie now and then.

RIVERTOWN PROFILE

Rivertown is a small village of 75 people. Residents live in log cabins nestled along a clear water tributary of a major Alaskan river. The mixture of spruce/birch forests and valley plains support an abundant small and large game population; freshwater fish are also plentiful. With access to the sea only 40 miles away, the environment offers an unusually diverse food supply.

Until the establishment of gold mines fifty years ago, the villagers lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle -- hunting, fishing, and trapping at various sites within a 200-mile radius. A trading post, church, and school were established after the gold strikes and drew a stable population to the village site. Today, although everyone in the village still depends on subsistence activities, all of the villagers live primarily at the village site.

Mining activity has decreased substantially. Although a few miners intermarried, most left the area when the mines shut down. The predominantly Native villagers still engage in subsistence activities, but now they also augment their subsistence with cash. Permanent jobs are scarce in the small community; money is hard to come by. The few stable positions (health aide, teacher aide, postal worker, school janitor, village administrator) have low turnover rates. When someone leaves a job, it is usually kept in the family. Most villagers depend heavily on summer employment such as firefighting, cannery jobs, and construction

work. These jobs are unpredictable and have the added disadvantage of conflicting with the summer subsistence activities.

Except for special traditional events, dress is modern. Indeed the high school students sport the fashions found in any large city. Residents under the age of 25 do not speak the Native language. Only the very old people speak it on a daily basis. Yet despite the outward signs of western influence, all villagers see themselves as Native.

THE VETERAN TEACHER IN A NEW COMMUNITY

Bob is an experienced teacher who taught in inner city schools before coming to Alaska twelve years ago. Bob and Betty grew up in the same rural community in the South where their experience with austere living conditions prepared them to cope with village life. They enjoy outdoor activities. They don't mind "roughing it." They have spent several Alaska summers in a tent.

"I'd planned to be a park ranger, not a teacher," Bob recalls, "but teaching's been good to me. I've reached some kids headed for the wayside and helped them find another path. It's been a rewarding job for me."

A young woman from nearby East Fork Village was visiting in Rivertown when the Perthells arrived. Mr. Perthell had been her teacher in East Fork. "You guys are lucky to have Mr. Perthell," she informed her 10th grade cousin. "He's a great guy. He'll be your friend and joke around with you, but he makes it clear that he's 'the teacher' too. He'll make you learn."

The district office personnel knew that Bob was well-liked in East Fork and Mountain Valley. "We were sorry to lose him six years ago," said a staff member. "Now we're glad to have him back. Bob has the rare ability to create positive change without being threatening. He gets something going, then quietly moves other people into the critical positions. He doesn't need to be in the limelight. People like him. It's a relief to have him at Rivertown -- it's one of our hardest positions to fill."

Bob and Betty have more firsthand knowledge of alcohol abuse than most new teachers. Bob is an alcoholic who's been "dry" for eight years.

"I was on a downward spiral -- thank God and Betty I pulled out of it," Bob says with tangible relief in his voice. "Alcohol is a tough drug. My experience with it has given me some compassion for what people here are going through."

Mountain Valley and East Fork are nearby villages with problems similar to Rivertown. The Perthells left the area in part because of their frustration with the alcohol abuse. The family moved to a town in another district where they'd expected to be able to leave such problems

behind. Instead, they found they had to contend with alcohol abuse there also. Two of Bob's top students were killed during his last year there. The boys, while intoxicated, had driven snowmachines into some low hanging cables. Their necks had been broken.

Bob admits, "It can be discouraging, real discouraging. You have such high hopes for the kids. You put so much effort into teaching them, working with them, and maybe they end up dead, or in jail, or with a baby when they're close to being babies themselves. Sometimes you wonder if it's worth it. But then once in awhile you get a kid who makes it. One of my Mountain Valley girls is in college right now. She is real smart in math. I used to egg her on, I'd tell her, 'You're going to end up pregnant -- you won't make it to college!' It was a kind of a dare. I bet her 50 dollars she wouldn't graduate from college. Well, she's in her third year now, and I get periodic letters from her. She reminds me of that bet every time. She plans to collect on it!

"There are rewards like that that keep you going. I realized after living in the other village that alcohol abuse is everywhere and that I couldn't run away from it. We really like the people in this region -- they're friendly, warm folks -- and we decided to come back. I decided to try to focus on my job, on teaching the kids. I'm going to try not to let the other stuff get me down."

The Perthells quickly settled into a routine. Bob tinkered with minor repairs on the house; he fixed the porch steps and built an alder pole railing. He put in a barge order for plywood skirting. In August, the family bought a wooden riverboat from Sam's brother, and Bob took his three older kids on many day-long fishing trips. They had been successful with trout fishing; now they wanted to cast for the silver salmon that would soon be running strong up the river. They wanted to catch enough of the salmon to fill their freezer for winter.

Betty had never been interested in fishing. She preferred to spend most of her time at home with the children. She found that the local people liked young children, and her baby was a real asset in getting to know people. She got acquainted with most of the village people when they went to check the mail. The Post Office is a common gathering spot; often people sit around for an hour or so in the lobby, just visiting. An extrovert by nature, Betty usually walked right up to people, extended her hand and introduced herself. Although villagers are generally reserved around strangers, especially white strangers, most people responded positively to her warmth. But Betty sensed that one woman didn't like her.

"When I'd joke around with folks at the Post Office, Maria was the only one who wouldn't respond. I don't know why -- I didn't think I'd done anything to offend her."

One day Maria sent her daughter over to borrow a cake pan. A young man had recently died of hypothermia after falling out of his boat; the entire village was preparing for his funeral. The coffin was being built from some of the Perthell's skirting plywood. A village leader was carving a birch wood cross in accordance with church specifications. Friends and relatives had been notified of the death on the region's only AM radio station; they were requested to come for the funeral. The influx of people and the impending funeral feast necessitated that large quantities of food be prepared. The women in the village were spending hours preparing both traditional foods (such as an "ice cream" of whipped berries, fish, and tallow) and modern food dishes.

Betty sent a pan to Maria with a note offering her help. A short time later, Maria came over herself with three cake mixes. She looked Betty in the eye for the first time and smiled. "It ended up that I baked three cakes and a turkey that day," Betty remembers. "I never knew why Maria had been standoffish to me. We never spoke of it."

Betty is aware of the importance attached to funeral rites. "It's such a hard thing to lose a loved one, no matter what the circumstances are. I try to help out. I fix food, lend out extra bedding, babysit. At Mountain Valley, I donated my drapes to line a coffin. But I don't go to funerals -- I can't handle that."

Betty attributed much of her ease in getting along with villagers to what she learned from living in other villages.

"At one village we lived in, I started off on the wrong foot. I was listening to gossip and passing it on. Several people were quite irritated with me before I really realized what I was doing. Bob is the one who pointed it out to me. To make up for it, what I did was, I went up to the people I'd been spreading gossip about -- I was really nervous -- and I owned up to what I'd been doing and I apologized. I've been real careful about that ever since.

"I've learned not to take sides -- I treat everyone the same. It's important to be friendly with everyone, not just a few people."

Betty found that some of the previous Rivertown teachers had held the villagers at arm's length. One local woman was astonished that Betty would allow her to use the washing machine when she babysat. At home she used a washboard to wash clothes for her family of eight. Although the woman often babysat for teachers, she'd never been able to use the washing machine.

One teaching couple in the past had not allowed their elementary-age children to associate with village children outside of school. While the Perthells' kids had to comply with strict orders to stay away from the river, they were allowed to play anywhere else in the village, and they quickly made friends.

"The Native people are different in some ways, but basically we're all the same," Betty observed. "In small places like this, you get to know about each other in detail -- you know too much at times. I treat people here like they are my relatives. I come from a 'touchy' family and I hug a lot. That's foreign to people here, but I think they like it. They get the message that I'm not afraid of contamination, that I regard them as my equals.

"It's important not to separate your kids from the village kids. I want my kids to get along with all kinds of people. Already they have formed some close friendships, and they have learned a lot. Sometimes they've learned that they're lucky to live the way they do. Some of their friends don't have basic needs met."

The Perthells have seen some things that are in direct conflict with their own values and morals.

"In some places we've lived, we've found that sometimes sexual experimentation among children is handled differently than we might like. I worry about how such things will affect my children. Maybe I'm naive, but I have a lot of faith in our influence over our kids. We've discussed sex explicitly with them at a much younger age than I'd ever expected. We've been open and frank with them. We want communication lines on this, and any issue, wide open. Our kids know that we have different standards than other parents here. They know we do not want them to be sexually active. So far they've been able to comply with our standards and still be a part of their peer groups. As far as confronting the villagers about these things -- we haven't, that wouldn't be a good idea. But we will work to institute a sexual abuse education program in the school."

The Perthells feel that it's important to keep in mind that it takes more than fulfilling a residency requirement to make them part of the village.

Betty says, "We don't vote at village council meetings. We don't even attend unless invited. We get involved with the village people, not the village politics."

VILLAGE POLITICS

The village political organization has undergone dramatic changes in recent years. Ostensibly, the village is governed by a traditional council (authorized under the Indian Reorganization Act or IRA) and regular village council (vested with state authority). In actuality, many other political influences are at play.

For twenty-five years, the village was "run" by Gregory, a successful local businessman. As a young man, Gregory had left the village for a few years to join the Army. He took some college courses during that time -- the first person in his village to do so. When he returned, the

traditional Native leaders looked to him for advice with paper work and business dealings. He became the president of both the government-recognized councils in his early twenties. He served in both positions for several terms and then relinquished the titles, though he still worked behind the scenes. Gregory was no longer the titular head of the village, but bureaucratic agencies continued to consult with him, rather than the official leaders of the village. The agencies found him more knowledgeable than his successors. The IRA and village council presidents grumbled about this practice, but they did not take any action to change it.

In the last eight years, Gregory has relinquished some control of his own accord. He now becomes involved in the day-to-day affairs of the village only occasionally, usually when issues affect him directly or affect the region at large.

After Gregory's abdication, the two-council form of government became increasingly operational. For several years, council president positions were filled by a variety of citizens who performed their duties with debatable success. Three years ago, Richard and Alex were elected IRA president and village council president respectively. Although villagers generally agree that neither man embodies the leadership qualities of the "old Chiefs," they have overwhelmingly re-elected the men to office each year.

Sam is a new actor on the political scene. He functions as unofficial advisor to Richard and Alex. Openly active in council affairs, he cannot serve in an official capacity until he fulfills parole conditions resulting from an alcohol-related felony. Since his conviction, he has quit drinking entirely and has taken an active and constructive interest in village affairs and Native issues. He is comfortable and competent in Native and White societies and is regarded by many villagers as a potential leader.

In addition to these governmental bodies, the traditional Native elder system is still alive. The Native elders seldom hold official leadership positions, but villagers continue to consult them -- especially regarding traditional matters such as hunting procedures, taboos, and religious affairs. It is rumored that some shamans are still alive and exert their influence on village affairs.

THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION

Rivertown, like many villages in Alaska today, is struggling to assume more control over its own affairs. It is a slow and sometimes arduous process. Until the establishment of a trading post, church, and school fifty years ago, the villagers lived a semi-nomadic lifestyle. People used to hunt, fish, and trap at various sites within a 200-mile radius. Today, although everyone in the village depends on some subsistence activities, all of the villagers live primarily at the village

site. The average villager has rudimentary reading and writing skills and needs assistance with filling out paperwork more complicated than a Sears catalog order blank. In the past, personal contacts with outside agencies were few and relatively uncomplicated. Gregory handled the more complex items of village concern.

In recent years, the necessity of dealing with formal western entities has increased dramatically. Now villagers receive a steady stream of forms and surveys concerning Native allotments, food stamps, various licenses, and so forth. The village councils handle hundreds of thousands of dollars yearly and are responsible for building projects, a variety of reports, compliance with government regulations, grant writing, and dealing with numerous government agencies. With little business and leadership experience to prepare them, they often find the western world and its plethora of paper and "high" words confusing. To compensate, the village has hired a consultant. But he is based in another town and is not always immediately accessible.

Neither the consultant nor Sam were available on the day a building supply representative, for example, flew in unannounced, to discuss the construction of a recently approved safe water facility in the village. The representative came with a construction proposal and a contract that he insisted must be signed immediately.

Sam came back from a fishing trip later that day to find the village legally committed to a $250,000 contract. He fumed incredulously, "They never called any other companies, never inquired about local hire limitations, nothing! So the building company gets $250,000. Is it a good deal? I have no idea, but if I'd been here, we sure as hell would've checked around!"

In accordance with the traditional custom of deference to elders, Sam used a more conciliatory tone when approaching Richard and Alex about the building contract. Although there is much subsurface tension in the village about a variety of matters, direct confrontations are unusual except in situations involving alcohol.

One young man, who completed his high school education in boarding schools in the Lower 48, feels that the village and the teacher nearly came to blows regarding the teaching of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and related issues. The teacher flatly refused to teach such material, saying it was not his responsibility to do so. He felt the Native corporations should be teaching such things. Another villager finally broke up the dispute. The teacher never made an attempt to teach anything about ANCSA, and the two men avoided each other for the rest of the school year.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND VILLAGE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE SCHOOL

On the surface, village-school relations appear calm, even apathetic. Villagers rarely express any discontent with the school to teachers or other school district personnel. But many villagers grumble among themselves about the lack of culturally relevant topic offerings. They are not pleased with the school holiday programs. They feel that the curriculum is weak and standards are low. They do not feel their children are being adequately prepared for either college or adult membership in the Native community.

The local school board could serve as an arena for these complaints. It could refer complaints to the regional board. But this never happens.

Sam calls the local school board "a joke." He feels that none of the members know the extent of their duties and he suspects that the district administration fosters their ignorance. He claims, "The local school boards were created by the superintendent as a PR move -- they were designed to give the locals an illusion of power. It's just a smoke screen designed to allow the big shots to go on doing whatever they want. The district office does ask for local board input but only on relatively minor issues. It was a big deal when the administration finally let the local board have a say in the Christmas break scheduling. But for true local control, we should be consulted on matters like teacher hiring and curriculum. After all, these are our children in the school. We have dreams for them, they have dreams for themselves. We should be given the opportunity for more input."

But most villagers, even those who voiced dissatisfaction with the school, regard formal education as the teacher's province and appear to relinquish authority over classroom affairs to the teachers. Active intervention by lay persons is felt to be inappropriate. Villagers can take more subtle action, however. One school board member claimed, "We can make it tough for teachers we don't like. We don't have to talk to them. We can ignore them, and never invite them to our homes. We can make them want to leave."

Rarely do teachers provoke the villagers into using such extreme measures. Generally villagers feel they have no more influence over formal education than the coming of the salmon runs. Teachers' arrivals and departures, the demands of the school year -- these are usually seen as unavoidable events that must be planned for but cannot be controlled.

THE REST OF THE TEACHING STAFF ARRIVES

The second new teacher arrived in the village a few days before school was to start. Randy had left a career as a journalist to obtain his teaching certificate. Now in his early 40's, he was ready to begin his first year of teaching. An outdoor enthusiast, he had wanted to come to Alaska since he was a young boy. Randy thought Rivertown an idyllic

spot. The heavily forested rolling hills were replete with game and reminded him of the upper Michigan of his childhood. Proximity to the coast promised a plentiful supply of seafood and opportunities for boating. Randy fantasized about sailboating, although the villagers warned him that this had been attempted unsuccessfully before. He wrote home that he had found the most beautiful spot in the world. "It's going to be a great year!" he predicted.

The villagers were less enthusiastic about Randy. No one seemed able to put into words what the problem was, but one parent summed up many villagers' feelings.

"He just rubs me the wrong way. I know I should give him a chance, but there's something about him I don't like. He's only been here a short time, and already he's borrowed a bunch of my tools. I need some of them back, but I don't want to have to ask him for them."

In contrast, feelings were warm about Bob and Betty. Alex was trying to negotiate a land sale for them. Alex said, "I want them to stay -- they're nice people and fit in really good here."

ACADEMIC CONTENT AND STANDARDS

Rivertown's two-classroom school had been built three years ago; a half court gymnasium had been built that summer. Randy was surprised at the school's modern layout and equipment. The cranberry red building housed a well-stocked library, a small shop, a restaurant-size kitchen, a lunchroom, five bathrooms, a small office, and several closets, in addition to the classrooms and gym. Each classroom contained two computers -- one for every four students.

Bob and Randy met at the school two days before school was to begin. The central officer had assigned six grades to each teacher, but, as is customary in many small schools, they had the freedom to adjust their schedules to suit the school population. No first or sixth graders were enrolled that year. Bob suggested that they divide the number of students in half. Bob ended up with grades 9-12 and eight students. Randy took the remaining eight students in grades 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8. Bob had hoped that they would be able to swap a few classes in order to capitalize on their subject area strengths. This did not prove feasible; they soon discovered they had similar academic backgrounds. Both of them were especially weak in mathematics. As the high school teacher, the burden of teaching courses out of certification areas fell heaviest on Bob. The district office reassured him that he could handle the task -- "All the high school kids are at least two years below grade level in every subject anyway."

Each teacher set up his own schedule. Randy's resembled elementary schedules throughout the country. Because he had younger children who required more direct supervision, he was assigned a full-time aide. No

money was available for a high school aide, but Bob planned to find part-time funding for one. He needed someone to cover for him when he had classes going in two rooms. He was especially concerned about making sure someone supervised the Vocational Education classes.

Bob did not want to decide on the whole high school program until he saw each student and helped them choose their electives. He drew up a tentative schedule based on the students' records. He knew he would be teaching English (Levels I - IV), Math (Algebra and Consumer), Economics, Science (Physical and Biology), and General Physical Education. He would also be teaching several electives. From his informal summer conversations with the high school students, he thought that he might be offering Typing, Bookkeeping, Weight Lifting, and Basic Carpentry.

When Bob perused the past year's school records, he found that the district office had correctly portrayed the students' test scores. All but one of last year's high school students had failed several subjects. He had heard that two students had become discouraged and dropped out. The only student who earned over a 3.0 grade point average was the previous teacher's own daughter.

The teacher who preceded Bob had attempted to raise achievement scores by instituting a rigorous academic program. He emphasized high standards, hard work, and mastery learning of basic subjects. He structured the Rivertown High School on the one subject per class period model found throughout the United States. He felt that teachers who lowered standards for Natives did them a disservice and unfairly limited their life opportunities.

Philosophically, Bob agreed that teachers should have high expectations for students. But he felt a rigid pre-set standard ignored the reality of the situation in many Alaska villages and could also end up limiting students' options.

Bob pointed out that building plans are adapted to fit each environment -- or should be. "We wouldn't build a high rise glass apartment here, we don't all wear the same size clothes -- what's wrong with tailoring standards to fit the student? I can't expect my students here to do homework each night like I might in Anchorage. Most kids here don't even have a bed to themselves, much less a place to study. It's unreasonable to expect them to do homework in the midst of a party. Expecting these kids to perform immediately up to 'Outside' standards is unrealistic and potentially damaging to the kids' self-esteem. I don't mean we should lose sight of the goal of academic excellence, but it makes more sense to me to strive for adequacy first, and then excellence. We are in a situation where most people in this village have not gone past 4th grade. These kids don't have the educational background that most city kids do and we need to compensate for that. These kids do want to learn and they can learn if properly motivated. The trick is finding out what motivates them -- you have to get to know your students in order to do that."

Bob felt it took about a year to get to know the children, the community, and the subtleties of village life. He didn't expect to be able to really start teaching until the second year. He advised a low-key approach.

"When I go into a village, I start out by stepping back and observing how I can fit in. A teacher out here has to be willing to listen as much as talk. People are quiet at first -- you have to get them in a situation where they will talk. One thing I do is allow people to get comfortable with me. I don't push myself on them. I let them see me and I visit with them, but I don't push myself. After awhile their natural curiosity will take over, and they find out more about you than what you think. I show them by the way I act that I'm here to teach their kids -- not take over the politics of the village. That's none of my business. If I spoke out on a village issue, people might listen to me out of politeness. But I don't think it's my place to get involved unless I'm asked. I really don't think what I have to say is as important as what they do. I try to keep in mind that this is not L.A., this is a Native society. I've been raised differently than folks here, and I can't expect them to live by my standards. I need to adjust my expectations to the local setting. I'm not saying, 'don't have opinions,' I know I sure do, but, as 'Outsiders,' we don't always know what's going one. We might think we do, but it's been my experience that, so many times, we don't have the entire picture. Acting on incomplete information is a sure way to embarrass yourself and even harm your relations with people."

THE START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

By the time school started, Bob knew the names of his eight students and had spoken to most of them when he met them in the Post Office or on the village paths. Attendance was sporadic the first few weeks of school. Bob wasn't surprised or upset. He felt that the school year started too early in an area where people would be heavily involved in subsistence activities until the end of September. He accepted the poor attendance as an inevitable result of trying to mesh the school and subsistence calendars.

As the only experienced teacher, Bob was forced to assume the principal/teacher position despite his distaste for paper work. He would have relinquished the position to Randy if the district office had allowed it. He knew Randy would have welcomed the extra pay and valued adding an administrative title to his resume. Bob sensed that Randy resented someone of the same age "bossing" him.

Randy would have preferred to teach just the early elementary grades, but he had to agree that the grade level division was logical considering that Bob had to teach all subject areas in more depth. Although 7th and 8th graders had never been his favorite age group, he resolved to try to do his best with them. Still, he found it difficult to relate to his

students. They were not openly belligerent like some junior high kids he'd known. Yet, in their own subtle way, they resisted him. They wouldn't listen to him. He couldn't get them to talk very much. They spent a lot of time just passively sitting -- when they were in school.

Bob's nonchalant attitude toward absenteeism irritated him. Randy felt the school staff should crack down on the truancy. Although he sympathized with the villagers' conflict between their subsistence lifestyle and the school schedule, he saw no other workable solution. If the school year started later, school would either have to stay open later in the spring (and the same problem with subsistence would occur) or the Christmas break would have to be reduced to a couple of days. Randy felt everyone needed a longer break at Christmas. He had already made plans to meet a friend in California.

After the moose season closed, students attended school more regularly. By then, Bob had established a smooth routine in his classroom, but Randy continued to have problems with his junior high students. Mostly, their lack of response irritated him. The 12-year-old son of the postmistress especially resisted him. Randy finally lost his temper when this boy refused to go to the board to work out a math problem. "Billy, I said get up to the board!" he yelled. Billy averted his eyes and stayed seated. With a few long strides, Randy arrived at the boy's desk. He grabbed Billy by the shoulders and shook him, continuing to yell. To his astonishment, Billy burst into tears and, wrestling free, ran out of the classroom.

Bob had to intercede to get Billy to come back to school. Randy apologized to Billy and his mother. Privately he felt that, although his behavior may have been unprofessional, he had at least succeeded in getting a reaction from the boy. Randy noted that Billy remained aloof and unenthusiastic, but at least he did his work now.

Discipline was a difficult issue for Randy. It disturbed him to see parents sitting calmly at a basketball game while their children ran wild in the school halls. He resented the assumption that the teachers would continue to act as disciplinarians as long as they were in the school building. Bob didn't seem to be disturbed, but Randy felt parents abdicated their responsibility in many areas. A few times he had tried to talk to parents about their children's unfinished schoolwork. So often they shrugged helplessly and said, "I tell him to do it, but he won't listen to me." Rivertown parents, it seemed to Randy, were content to have little influence over their children.

Bob's lax attitude regarding hall traffic also annoyed Randy. He had expected a relaxed attitude in a small school, but the present free flow of kids seemed chaotic. He tried to initiate a hall pass system to minimize his students' tendency to drift in and out of the classroom. He felt undermined when Bob, although verbally supportive, continued to allow his students to come and go freely. Randy was also upset at the school's open door policy. Every official visitor to the village, it seemed, would

stop first at the school. Generally, the visitors headed for Bob's room, but the two classrooms were side-by-side. Such visitors distracted his students also. Many of the visitors really had no business at the school, and Randy didn't see why they didn't go directly to the council president or whomever they needed to see. Bob also complained about all the interruptions, but he didn't take any action to curtail them.

In addition to outside visitors, the villagers seemed free to enter the building almost anytime. The men used the school shop regularly, and there was always an engine in pieces on the workbench or a woodworking project to step over. The school was also available as a showering and water hauling facility, and some of the school support staff encouraged friends to visit during working hours. At times Randy noticed people just wandering through with no observable purpose. He had caught whiffs of alcohol on people several times and felt very strongly that inebriated persons should be prohibited from school grounds.

One afternoon, Randy brought his students into the gym for P.E. and encountered a strange man inspecting the supply closet. He loudly ordered the stranger out of the gym and began his lesson. Bob reprimanded him after school that day about his ungracious behavior. Randy defended himself saying that he'd thought the man was drunk -- there was something different about him. Bob pointed out that if Randy had been more observant he would have noticed that the man had a limp and a glass eye -- these characteristics may have contributed to the illusion of intoxication. It turned out that this "different-looking fellow" was the president of the district school board. In Rivertown to visit relatives, he had stopped at the school to look at the new gymnasium completed over the summer. It was a project he had championed.

Bob Perthell acknowledged that the traffic in the school was a problem. He planned to encourage the village council president to intercept visitors who came on village business. He also wanted to set up regular hours for shop and shower use. But a certain amount of traffic, he thought, was a fact of life in village schools.

"In a small community like this, the school is the core of the village, and if someone needs something, a tool or whatever, they come there. The constant barrage of people does get hectic and I do plan to gradually tone it down. But you can't cut people off entirely. It's important to develop a good working relationship with the village people. We're isolated out here and we've got to depend on each other. When I have a problem at the school, I can't call the district office and say, 'Send a plumber out here right away.' But there <u>are</u> folks right here who can help. We've got a lot of skilled people <u>right</u> here in the village, people who have gone to various training programs or who have common sense know-how. I've never had a problem getting local help. But helping out is a two-way street."

When problems do come up with villagers, he contends, less direct conflict resolution works better.

He remembers when one man barged into the Mountain Valley school, drunk and belligerent, demanding to use the school radio to call for a planeload of whiskey.

"Teddy is a big guy, and he was intimidating as he yelled and shook the radio mike in my face. I knew he was too drunk to reason with, so I just walked up to him and hugged him. I told him, 'Teddy, I love you' and do you know, he broke down and cried right there in my arms. We've never had any problems since. In fact he and I were often hunting and fishing partners."

EARLY WINTER AND ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

The ice began to flow in the river in early October, and travel was restricted until after the river froze. After a couple of weeks of curtailed travel, everyone was anxious to get out. Randy's teacher aide was offended when she heard Randy say to Bob, "Looks like the Natives are getting restless." She never talked to him about the comment, but she mentioned it to several other villagers. Randy noticed a cooling in her behavior toward him but was unable to determine its cause. After a couple of days, he forgot about it.

A young man in the village began making large quantities of homebrew and included several of the older students in his parties. Some students repeatedly came to school hung over and reeking of alcohol. One eleventh grader quit attending. In Randy's view, the school staff should press charges against the alcohol supplier. Bob hesitated. He feared that the district office would object to the negative publicity.

One late afternoon, Randy walked into a school bathroom and found eighth grade Tommy passed out on the toilet with a loaded shotgun across his lap. Randy contacted Tommy's mother and found out that the boy had taken an uncle's bottle of whiskey. After drinking a large quantity, he had begun to fear that the uncle would retaliate against the theft. He had taken the shotgun for protection and left his house to hide from his uncle. Tommy's mother had feared a violent incident would result and was relieved to find out where her son was. She and Bob arranged to have the boy stay at her cousin's at the other end of the village until things cooled down.

Finally, Bob called the district office to inform them of the incident. Staff were alarmed about the drinking and willing to push for a "minor consuming" arrest. But, as Bob expected, they would have preferred not being involved. Confronting them with such information necessitated some official action. Bob's supervisor promised to confer with other staff members and call him back the next day with a plan of action.

That evening, Tommy's uncle got very drunk and severely beat another man. This action brought recent incidents to a head. The State Troopers were called in. They flew into Rivertown the next day, arrested Tommy's uncle, and also arrested the young man who had been supplying alcohol to minors. The beating victim had to be medivaced to the nearest hospital.

Bob recalls, "That period of a lot of drinking was a low point for me. It's so frustrating to prepare lessons, to try to enthusiastically present material, when you know your students have been up all night, haven't had breakfast, are upset about all they've seen the night before. I got to thinking, all I'm doing is teaching kids to be smart alcoholics, educated welfare-drawers. Maybe they'll be able to fill out their food stamp forms without help but that's all the good this education will do them."

As he spoke, Bob turned to gaze out his classroom window and his voice became almost inaudible. "It's so easy to get frustrated and not teach, to just go through the motions. Sometimes you feel like saying 'What the heck. I don't have to do this -- there's no one around watching me.' After all, who cares out here? The kids don't always care about their futures. Many times it's the furthest thing from their mind. There are days when they have no place to go to get away from the drinking, fighting, hollering and screaming -- their focus is on surviving, on today. It seems hopeless to try to emphasize the positive with them for six hours a day. It's so easy to sit around and feel sorry for the kids and not push them on."

Bob was silent for a few moments. Then he swiveled his chair away from the window and continued with resolve, "But you don't want to feel that way, you can't feel that way! You've got to keep motivated and push yourself through low points. You've got to keep your goals in mind and push yourself to get to them. It's a challenge all right -- that's what this is all about, beating a challenge. You've got to do the thing yourself that you're trying to teach your kids to do -- fight through frustrations to a goal. You have to keep after the kids, keep them motivated, have high expectations for them. You've got to keep working for them."

Bob suspended Tommy for three days at the district office's recommendation. He concurred that a cooling off period was needed. Bob knew that Tommy was embarrassed about the incident. When he took the boy aside on his first day back, he let him know that as far as he was concerned, Tommy was off to a fresh start and that Bob didn't anticipate any more such incidents. He asked him to contact him in the event that anything was troubling him. Bob told Randy that Tommy was a good kid who would benefit from a bit of gentle direction at this point in his life.

With two troublemakers arrested and taken out of the village, the community returned to normal. Drinking still occurred, but no violence. Although the majority of Rivertown people had definite problems with alcohol, Bob felt that basically they were good people.

Bob disagreed with people who felt that Rivertown was a "bad" place. He was annoyed with the school district's response to his call.

"All I wanted was information. I wanted to know our options and responsibilities in dealing with minor consumption, things like that. Well, now the District is convinced that we have a big problem down here that we can't handle. Bringing it to their attention has just reinforced their opinion that this is a 'bad' school. They're saying we need a drill sergeant/teacher up here to whip kids into line. Our kids don't need that -- it would be the worst thing for them! So now we've got this bad rep to deal with. I've seen school districts shunt 'bad schools' in subtle ways. I didn't want that to happen here."

Randy was pleased that two of the village "bad guys" had been removed but felt a few more should be taken away, too. He was dismayed to see life falling into a normal routine. He felt the recent violent events presented an opportunity to shake things up, to "clean up the town." He wanted to encourage people to press charges against other law offenders. He wanted to bring alcohol abuse to the light, perhaps have a hearing on it. Bob did not endorse this strategy. Such a course of action, he felt, would cause a rift between the community and school and would change nothing. Randy accused Bob of avoiding controversy in order to safeguard his own position and salary. The disagreement stretched the already strained relationship between the two teachers. Thereafter, the two men avoided all but the most essential contact with each other. In the end, Randy did not initiate any action on the alcohol issue. He began to lose interest in his job and started counting the days until school would end.

ADDRESSING ALCOHOL ABUSE

Bob began to take class time to discuss alcohol abuse in the village. He worked the topic into his science and health classes.

"I don't get up there with a hellfire and damnation speech about the evils of alcohol. I think it's better to talk about things in a more informal way. I feel it's well worth class time to sit and talk with students, to let them express themselves and get some things off their chests. That way we all get to know each other better, and I convey to my kids that I really care and know what's going on with them. I relate some of my personal experiences to the kids so it's not only them opening themselves up. Talking like that has helped us develop a good rapport with each other."

Gradually students began to bring up specific alcohol-related incidents in class. Bob remembered a discussion about reasons for drinking.

"The kids gave me reasons, and I put them up on the board. They said people drank 'to get high and have a good time.' I kept asking them, 'And then what happens?' and they'd say, 'They start fighting.' I listened and wrote down all they said and we ended up with a list showing that, although people started out wanting to have a good time, they often ended up being arrested, being hurt, being killed, things like that. The kids brought up some instances of when this had happened and I let them talk about them. We talked about Tommy passing out on the commode with a gun and the potential danger of that situation. I also brought up situations where people drank a little and quit and they really did have a good time. I wanted them to have something to compare to."

Bob is careful to point out that he is not against alcohol use, just its abuse. "No matter what we might wish, alcohol is here, and it's something we've got to live with. I want my students to see that proper use of alcohol is an individual decision. I want them to see that a person doesn't usually drink too much if he doesn't want to, that it's not usually a matter of force. It boils down to a matter of individual choice. That's why it doesn't work to try to force people not to drink. Whether we like it or not, people are going to do what they want to, and a lot of times the more you try and force them to do something else, the more they're going to fight it. That's why I couldn't support Randy's approach."

Bob thought such talks with his high school kids laid necessary groundwork for a change in attitude regarding alcohol usage. But the way adult abuse of alcohol affected his students still troubled him. He wanted to do something about the situation, but he hadn't figured out what.

Soon after he'd arrived in Rivertown, Bob realized that, although the villagers presented a unified front to outsiders, many factions existed. Alcohol was an especially divisive issue. When several families quit drinking entirely, their action inadvertently separated them from the rest of the drinking villagers. They stood out from the norm. Their difference highlighted the problems the others were having with alcohol. The drinking villagers put pressure on the non-drinkers to rejoin their group. Richard, the traditional council president who had been "dry" for seven years, told Bob that it was many years before people stopped trying to get them to drink again.

"People would bang at our door at all hours of the night, trying to get us to come out and party. At times I felt tempted, but then I would remember the way my kids used to look at me. They were afraid of me when I drank. Finally people realized we weren't going to join in and they quit bothering us."

The other two families who had quit drinking had much the same story to tell. They told Bob that one other family who had been "dry" for nine months had recently succumbed to the village pressures and began drinking again.

When he had first arrived in the village and was meeting people, Bob had quietly observed the villagers' decision-making process. He noted the pervasive influence of Gregory, but he also realized that the day-to-day decisions were made by Richard, Alex and Sam. Several times a week the three men gravitated to Alex's house for coffee in the late morning. This was the time that many decisions were made. It seemed significant to Bob that Rivertown residents would trust the village affairs to men who were reformed drinkers. He speculated that this indicated recognition of the widespread drinking problem and a desire to do something about it. The three nondrinkers had spoken to Bob about the pressures brought to bear on them when they had quit. He began to think an organized support group might offset the pressure and help others to quit. He decided to feel out the three men on the possibility of starting an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group in the village.

"I started out talking to them about alcohol abuse in general, how hard it is to quit, things like that. They know I am an alcoholic -- I've been pretty up-front about my problem. I've mentioned it when it's seemed appropriate, and word has gotten around. People know I have a common experience.

"When I drank, I never got to the point where I was falling down or raising Cain. It never affected my job. But drinking interfered with my personal life. It contributed to the breakup of my first marriage. When I was ready to quit, it helped me to have a support network. In talking to various people, I found that many folks here had experience with AA groups. Some people have been forced to attend when they'd been in jail. Sam attended willingly when he was in jail and even went through some alcohol abuse training when he was in -- he's a qualified counselor. He and I got stuck together in the big city in the fall -- it was bad weather for flying -- that's when we talked about all this. When I broached the subject of starting an AA group in Rivertown, he was enthusiastic. He suggested I mention the idea of Richard and Alex."

Bob had been able to speak to Sam openly -- the two men felt an affinity for each other and had similar interests. But Bob knew that his approaches to Richard and Alex would have to be more calculated.

"I know I am successful at getting people to do things. I don't think there's any big secret to it. Everybody knows that people are different, but not everybody takes differences into account in personal interactions. In the classroom, I tailor my approach to each kid individually. I get to know what motivates each kid, and I use that knowledge. I use the same tailoring approach when I'm trying to persuade someone. It's not really a conscious action at the time -- it's part of the way I deal with people in any situation. I trust my instincts and just act naturally in the way that seems right, seems the most effective."

When pressed, Bob could explain how he had approached the other two men.

"Richard is altruistic. He simply cares about people. I spoke to him about the personal need I had for a support group like AA. I said it was one of the things I missed about living in a small place. He wanted to help me out and recognized that such a group could help others too. He suggested we get one started. I agreed to look into it.

"My approach to Alex was quite different. He is a cautious guy, but he gambles if there is the potential of a positive political outcome. Then too, he has a more comprehensive vision than Richard does. He thinks more about the village as a whole than about individual people. I told him that in some places, courts require criminal alcohol abusers to attend AA meetings as a condition of parole. I know that he recognized that such an action might be an effective solution to the alcohol problem; yet externally mandated AA attendance would remove responsibility from him if the action appeared unfavorable. If public opinion was favorable, he would be able to step to the forefront. He, too, asked me to look into getting an AA group started."

Bob found out what was involved in starting the group and relayed the information to Sam. He knew it would get back to Richard and Alex. Then he sat back and waited. He feels that "people move a little slower out here." Trying to ramrod a project through could be counterproductive. He guessed that the three men would need some time to mull the idea over among themselves. Three weeks after Bob had given the information to Sam, Alex invited Bob over for coffee one Saturday morning. Richard and Sam were at the house when Bob walked in. The four men talked over the idea and agreed to hold the first meeting in one week. Sam offered to put up a sign at the Post Office. Ten weeks after Bob had first mentioned the idea to Sam, Rivertown's first AA meeting was held at the village clinic. Six people attended. Everyone agreed to hold weekly meetings. Four of the six returned the next week and brought two new friends.

Bob was encouraged. In time, he felt, more people would attend, and the experience would have a positive effect.

"I can't talk about particulars because what goes on in an AA meeting is confidential. But generally, we talk about ourselves, our common problem. It's an uplifting experience to relate to another human being in a completely honest and open way. We don't have that trust here yet but I'm hoping it will develop."

TEACHING COOPERATION

Content that AA meetings were addressing adult alcohol abuse, Bob turned his attention to another problem. Like many teachers in small schools, Bob filled a multitude of roles. As a long-time basketball player, he felt qualified to coach the school basketball team. He was pleased to accept that responsibility. At the first practices, however,

he was dismayed to find the students viciously competitive towards each other.

"There was no team spirit at all. The ultimate goal was to win at any cost. When one kid made a bad shot or something, everybody was there to lambast him. Sometimes I'd have to break up fights on the basketball court. It was really ironic because I've always seen the goal of athletics as winning through cooperation. Sports teach a goal that's relevant to any endeavor -- the importance of working with other people. It became a personal goal of mine to work on getting these kids to cooperate. I started out by explicitly telling kids how to behave on the court. I had them shake hands all around at the end of each practice session and game -- win or lose. I tried to model talking through each game, the strong and the weak points, but in a constructive way. Gradually they learned how to lose more graciously. But also, they began to win more games. The wins came as a result of pulling together. Well, by the time the district tournament came around, our team won the sportsmanship trophy. I think those kids were as proud of that as if they'd won the games. I know I was. I think the kids saw that if they had continued fighting each other, they wouldn't have come as far as they had. It was a real accomplishment for us all."

Bob wanted to continue to reinforce the value of cooperation after the basketball season was over. It occurred to him that Boy Scouts might be a way to do that. He wrote away to the state organization for information on starting a troop.

Information in hand, he once again approached the three men he considered key figures in the local decision-making process. He spoke to the men individually. With Sam, he talked about his efforts to engender a cooperative spirit among the kids. To all three of the men Bob presented scouting as a way to teach Native cultural values such as respect for the land and responsibility to family and community. It would be a way to restore the revered place of the elders, he said, and get young people learning from the old people again.

The proposal aroused no controversy. Alex endorsed the idea enthusiastically, as did Sam and Richard. Bob decided to attend the next scheduled council meeting two weeks away and bring the idea before the full council. He needed a sponsoring organization, and the council seemed the likeliest body.

"I was surprised to see that 'Boy Scouts -- Bob Perthell' was already on the agenda -- and as the first item! Everyone liked the idea. When I asked for a loan from the council to buy uniforms, they readily agreed. Someone suggested we could make the amount needed to reimburse them by operating a concession stand at the upcoming spring carnival."

The smaller boys liked the idea so much that a Cub Scout group was quickly formed. People talked about starting a "peewee" version. Hamburgers and pop sold well at the carnival, and the Scouts made more

than enough money to pay back the council. The council was so pleased by the Scouts' hard work that they forgave the loan and granted additional monies to pay for Cub Scout uniforms.

Bob was pleased with the progress that had been made, but he worried about the future of the organization. "So many times teachers come into a village and start something good, but the whole thing collapses when they leave. It's best to plan for the reality that I'm not going to be around forever -- I need to groom a replacement. I'm going to try to keep the program going at a reduced level this summer. Everyone's too busy fishing to go all out. It's going to be critical to find someone who'll come on as leader when I do go."

CLASSROOM AFFAIRS: THE END OF THE YEAR

Some of the same boys who were going around doing good deeds, like helping old people carry packages, were still acting out in Randy's room. In the beginning of the year, Randy's approach had been hard-nosed and strict. He'd had to admit that this method had failed to achieve positive results. His inability to find a classroom approach that worked and his strained relationship with Bob, left him disheartened. By Christmas, he had given up. After Christmas, he had adopted a laissez-faire attitude. Now nothing seemed to bother him.

His teacher aide complained, "He lets the boys walk around with their shirts off and lay on top of the tables. The teenagers bring their tape decks and turn the volume up as high as it can go -- I have a hard time hearing the little kids in the reading circle! But when I tell them to turn the music down, Randy tells them, 'It's okay, you don't have to.' That really makes me angry. I'm thinking about quitting."

An unannounced visitor from the district office was also dismayed about the bare-backed students lounging on the floors and table in Randy's classroom. Randy's delinquency in mailing in his lesson plans also irritated him. Randy pleaded cabin fever and promised to try to improve. The district staff member left only slightly mollified.

Rivertown was not turning out to be the paradise Randy had envisioned. He didn't have any outdoor equipment and found it hard to participate in outdoor activities. Randy was disillusioned about Rivertown for other reasons.

"This place is screwed up," he said two weeks after the district office visit. "Bob seems to think the people here are fine, upstanding citizens with a bit of a drinking problem. He's got his head in the sand if you ask me -- most of the people here are hard-core alcoholics. The idea of gradual, nice and easy change is ridiculous. What's needed here is radical, ruthless confrontation. People need to be slapped in the face with their alcoholism! It tears my heart out to see the irrevocable

damage that's being done to the young people in this village. The kids don't have a chance in hell at this rate.

"People have come to think this way of living is normal -- that is a dangerous mind-set. This fallacy needs to be exposed and people need to be confronted with the abnormality of their ways. What's needed here is an honest mirror that will reflect the harsh reality. Once I thought I could fill that role," Randy's voice became cynical. "But after all, I am a realist, and when the 'powers that be' exerted their pressure on me, I realized that if I didn't knuckle under, I was going to have one very short-lived career. So I caved in. Teaching under these conditions is a joke anyway. This is like having a school on 4th Avenue in Anchorage. Well, I'm tired of stepping over bodies to get to the schoolhouse door. I want to teach kids whose most pressing concerns in life are saving money to buy a new dirt bike and feeling sad about the death of the family cat. The kids here have to be worried about keeping warm at 20 below, scavenging food, and avoiding the wrath of their drunken parents. I can't take this anymore even if they wanted me to stay.

"I've got an 'agreement' with the Super. I finish up the year and leave quietly and he writes me a nice little letter about my 'potential' and what an 'asset' I'll be to another school. Funny thing is, I do have potential. I know I don't have my teaching act together yet, but, in another setting, I'll do fine. I have an 'inquisitive mind' and I give kids the freedom to think creatively. The kids here don't realize it yet, but they'll thank me for that someday."

By the last month of school, it was common knowledge that Randy would not be returning. There was palpable relief among the parents in the village. Sam had a seventh grade boy. He claimed he had to force his son to go to school each morning, although the boy had previously enjoyed school.

"My Junior is an okay kid, but he turned into a little monster the minute he walked into Randy's room. As janitor, I'm in the school a lot, and I have more of an opportunity than most folks to observe what goes on in the classrooms. Several times I've had to talk Junior and his buddies out of beating Randy up. Every day I'd tell him, 'Only 20 more school days,' then '19, 18'...I was sure glad when we made it to the end of the school year without an incident.

"The curious thing is Junior -- and all the kids -- act great around Bob. I was in the gym one day when Bob was giving a little lecture about stretching exercises to the ball team. Junior was giving the punching bag a jab now and then. I could tell it was bugging Bob. Several times he asked Junior to stop. I could tell Junior tried. But that red leather ball was just irresistible, I guess. He just had to give it one more punch. Bob took one giant step over to Junior. I thought Bob was going to hit him. Instead, he hugged Junior, then turned him around to face the rest of the class. Bob held Junior's wrists and stretched his arms out and used him as an example of what muscles needed to be stretched and so

forth. He even made some comment about how big Junior's muscles were and how they were going to get even bigger as he played ball. By the time Bob let him go, Junior was pretty swelled up about himself. He didn't jab at that punching bag any more either."

The only complaint Sam had about Bob was that his teaching was dull.

"I've been in his classroom when they're doing their science lessons. It's all, 'Read pages nine to twelve and answer the questions at the end of the chapter.' I think he should liven things up -- get the kids involved in experiments or something. I don't know, his classes seem kind of boring to me. But I have to admit, the kids are always attentive.

"And I think he's doing an admirable job when you consider that he has to teach so many different subjects. I did some long-term subbing last spring when one of the teachers had an operation. Until then, I'd always thought teachers had it easy. But I came home every night from school more tired than if I'd been working construction. There aren't many teachers who could do half the job Bob's done. I know I couldn't."

Most of the villagers regard Bob as one of the best teachers they have had. Complaints about the school decreased to almost nothing. Almost everyone commented on Bob's sincere regard for his students. One old man said, "Anybody can see Bob likes these kids -- he's always hugging them!"

SUMMER IN RIVERTOWN

Bob and Betty made plans to stay for the summer. They were trying to buy the little house they were living in. Bob was hoping to be able to add on a bedroom by fall. Betty was enthusiastic about growing a garden. She had been ordering seeds since February, and their kitchen table was covered with trays of cabbage and broccoli starts. She made Bob go over the ground with a rototiller before he left for three weeks. He had to attend a short summer session to obtain the three college credits he needed for his teaching certificate renewal. "I hate going to town," she exclaimed. "I'm going to sit right here with my girls and watch my garden grow."

Over the winter, Betty had made many friends in the village. She loved to joke and had developed friendly relationships. Tony, one of the most violent men in the village when drunk, would tease her every day when she went to check mail. "The trouble with Betty is ...," he would pause suspensefully for the benefit of the group gathered in the post office. "She laughs too much!" he'd finish triumphantly, and everyone would explode with laughter. Betty would look indignantly at Tony and make a show of spluttering at him before she joined in the laughter. "You know Tony doesn't say a word to me when he's drunk," Betty commented. "Nobody does. They seem to know there's a certain way to act toward me. I appreciate that."

That summer some friends flew out to do some fishing. Bob had the idea that a fishing lodge would be a productive business at Rivertown. He wanted to see what was involved in guiding before bringing up the idea to the council as a possible business venture. "People here are always complaining that there's not enough to do and obviously there's a dearth of ways to make a living," Bob explained. "The fish guiding business seems a natural for this area."

Half-way through the summer, Betty's mother became very ill, and Betty took Louisa "Outside" while she cared for her mother. Bob and the three oldest children stayed behind.

When Betty came back a few weeks later, she said that it was hard to return to the village. She admitted to being "a bit tired. I'd forgotten how nice it was to be close to family. I guess I really enjoyed being with my folks, despite the emergency situation."

A couple of weeks before school began, East Fork Village sent a local school board member down to talk to Bob. The village wanted him and his family to come back to teach there. "It was flattering," Bob admitted. "But I couldn't leave Rivertown after all the groundwork I'd laid. I told them I wouldn't rule out returning sometime, but not this year. I was just getting to the point where I'd really be able to teach. We had the AA and the Boy Scouts going. Last spring I started an old timer coming into the school once a week. He told stories and showed the kids how to make things like snow glasses. I wanted to develop the whole thing into a cultural heritage-type project. And I really knew my kids. I wanted to help Shelley get her store going. Jimbo wanted to learn to weld. Lisa needed help getting her Skill Center paperwork filled out. Betty really wanted to go back though. She had some very close friends at East Fork. But it just wasn't the right time for me to leave."

THE NEW TEACHER ARRIVES AND THE SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS

Two days before school was to start, Randy's replacement arrived. Fred was a Midwesterner who had taught in his hometown for three years. His wife, Nancy, was working toward her elementary education degree. She had enrolled in correspondence classes; she wanted to complete 12 credits over the winter. The couple had always dreamed of coming to Alaska but had a town, not a village, in mind. When jobs in the urban areas proved hard to find, Fred accepted the position at Rivertown. They agreed to stay for one year; Fred planned to continue to seek another position for the next year.

They moved into Randy's old house. The dilapidated condition of the small tarpaper dwelling dismayed them. "How can you stand this backward life?" Nancy asked Betty more than once. Betty didn't have a satisfactory answer for her, but she was getting tired of hearing the question.

Before they'd arrived, Fred and Nancy had contemplated starting a family while in Rivertown. They changed their minds swiftly. "This is no environment for raising children," Nancy declared firmly. "I think you're either really tough or nuts," Nancy told Betty. Betty found her visits with Nancy tiring and stopped going over to her house. Nancy was not much of a visitor. She set up a desk in Fred's classroom and spent a lot of time working hard at her studies. The couple spent most of their waking hours at the school. They preferred it to their "little shack."

Fred was an unassuming man. Fifteen years younger than Randy, he was quite content to have Bob for a boss. He looked up to him and counted on him for advice. At first Bob was flattered. With the passage of time, however, Fred's constant questions wore on him. Fred seemed to need to involve Bob in even the most insignificant of matters. He couldn't even tighten the screw on a loose table leg without coming to Bob to ask for help in locating a screwdriver. But Bob recognized that Fred was a good teacher. Even Bob's twins were excited about school. Fred had a special way with the junior high kids. They liked him, too.

The couple seemed to get along in the village. Nancy found no romance in the "rustic" lifestyle and criticized local social problems, but she confined her remarks to Fred or her journal. She thought she might write a book someday about her experiences in Rivertown. Although Fred and Nancy were not overly social, at least they aroused no anger in the community.

BETTY LEAVES

In late October, Betty began having serious medical symptoms. She took the two girls with her and flew into town for a check-up. The doctors wanted her to stay for more extensive tests. She decided to fly back to her folks and have her old family doctor do the work. She took the girls with her but left the boys -- she felt they should be with their father. Bob suggested taking some leave time to join her, but she rejected the idea saying that the situation wasn't serious enough to warrant spending the extra money. The family's finances were low after Betty's summer trip "Outside." Bob had his school duties.

The basketball season was getting underway, and Bob spent every afternoon coaching. The Scouts were planning an overnight spearfishing trip. Although Sam was the chaperone, Bob was coordinating the trip. The school quarter was drawing to a close, and Bob had to compile the quarterly attendance report. Then, too, the district had added an extra course for him to teach -- private pilot ground school. He had to struggle to keep one lesson ahead of his students. He was busy. On the day the quarterly report was due, he barely made the mail plane with the finished copy. He had to ask the pilot to hand deliver it.

"I get a little pissed off at the school district at times. They attach an inordinate amount of importance to these forms. It's hard to imagine that a small school like this would require so much paper to keep it going. There are the PL-142 cards, the attendance reports, timesheets, lesson plans, immunization records. I won't even take a sick leave day when I'm sick -- there's too much paperwork to fill out to get the sub paid. And it's not like this is all I have to do! I have seven classes each day -- seven preps -- even more when you consider the variety of grade levels. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if the classes were in my field. But really I'm not qualified to teach science or math, much less ground school! I have double the prep time for those subjects. Then I have all the people coming to the school needing help with one thing and another. And of course my boys to care for."

Bob talked to Betty every day from the one village phone at the clinic. "Not exactly private," Bob said.

After Betty had been gone for three weeks, the phone went out of order. Bob didn't get any letters from her and started to worry. Finally, a week later, the phone was repaired. When Bob called Betty, he was shocked to hear her news. She would not be coming back. Her medical treatment reports were completed. She was under treatment but had no health problem that required close proximity to a doctor. She just didn't want to come back.

"I couldn't figure it out," Bob said. "I still can't. I thought she liked Rivertown -- everyone likes her and she had so many friends. But she says they're not the deep friendships she needs. She wanted me to quit my job and come down, too. It just wasn't like her to be so irresponsible. She was unconcerned about money or my contract obligation. I was in a quandary for days. I gave notice at one point. Finally, I decided I couldn't quit in mid-year. I felt sure that in time she would change her mind."

Betty didn't change her mind. She enrolled Mary Dee in a school near her parents' home. She started to date an old friend. She went on a spending spree and charged a blue fox coat. "She always wanted something made out of blue fox," Bob recalled morosely.

THE REST OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

Bob continued to teach but with less enthusiasm. Everyone in the village noticed his low spirits and sympathized. People brought him food. They gave his boys special treats. Fred and Nancy bought an airplane in November and offered to take the boys with them on their weekend trips to the city. But Bob didn't trust Fred's flying, and he felt a comfort in having his sons with him.

Sam, the janitor at the school, was not so sympathetic about Bob's unfortunate turn of events. "I can't help but be disappointed," he said. "Bob is just doing the minimal that is required of him. His students are absent more than they used to be. They're having to do a lot more work by themselves. Many times I walk by Bob's classroom and he's just sitting in his chair staring out the window. We haven't had an AA or Boy Scout meeting in a month and a half now. I can't help but be disappointed. I'd heard so much about him, and I thought he was going to be able to really get this school rolling. Fred should be helping him out a bit more. But they are never around. They're always off in that plane of theirs. They seem only aware of themselves."

Christmas vacation came, and all the teachers left the village. Bob took his boys to visit friends in a larger town in the state. He said he couldn't afford to go "Outside."

One day before classes resumed, the teachers returned. The vacation seemed to have done them all good. Bob seemed almost as energetic as he had been before Betty left. He talked about getting an oral history project going. A friend had taught him how to develop film, and he came back with the necessary chemicals. He planned to make the welding cubicle double as a dark room. "I'm going to give it my best shot the second half," Bob insisted.

By late February, Bob was beginning to show signs of depression. His boys started having trouble with the other children. Frankie was the timid twin, and often he would run into Bob's classroom crying. Danny was tougher, and he tried to defend his brother. He got into several fist fights on his behalf. Danny started talking back to Bob. Bob realized the boys missed their mother and were confused about the separation. But their behavior alarmed him, and he didn't feel he was dealing with it well. He decided to send the boys to his folks for the remainder of the school year.

The villagers were not surprised when Bob announced that he would not be returning to Rivertown. They liked him and would miss him, but they understood his reasons for leaving. He had come to accept the fact that Betty would not be coming back. He needed a family situation. He needed someone to help him raise his boys.

Bob planned to look for a teaching position in an urban area. If he couldn't find the kind of job he wanted, he decided, he would go back to school and work toward a Master's degree in Technical Writing.

Bob recalled that he had identified short teaching terms as a major problem in Bush schools. "After all I've said about the need for committed rural teachers, I'll be there on the airstrip catching the first plane after school gets out. In all fairness to myself, I think I have ample reason to amend my plans. This has been an exhausting year for me. Betty's leaving was such a blow to me, and I just can't seem to recoup. I guess I never really appreciated my family until it was gone. This is not

really a bad place, and these are not really bad people here. But it's not a good place for me or my boys now, and I'm not good for it. Without a close family to go home to, some of the things that happen here -- there are always a few bad apples everywhere -- get to me in a way they never did before. It's time, past time, for me to leave. I don't know where I'm headed exactly, but I'm going. I've started seeing a positive side to all of this. Who knows? It could give me 'a new lease on life' and all that. Maybe life really does start at 45!" Bob laughed.

"Oh, I don't know where it's all going to lead, but I know I'm a survivor. And even though things didn't turn out as I planned, I'm leaving behind some accomplishments I'm proud of. I think Sam will keep the Boy Scouts going -- he'll be a good leader. The AA group might not fare so well. In retrospect, it probably wasn't a good idea to require attendance of anybody -- I know myself that no one can force someone else to quit drinking. But even if it folds up, a precedent has been set -- one could be formed again.

"I feel good that people here have a more positive attitude toward the school. I think they know I'm responsive to them.

"Of course the best part of being here was my students. I know I wasn't performing up to par this year, and I know test scores didn't improve. But at least they didn't drop, and at least I left my students with a more positive attitude about school and about themselves. I always respected them as individuals."

DEPARTURE

School ended with a picnic on May 21st. The students, teachers, and some parents walked down the beach to the gravel bar, called Casey's Point in honor of the barge pilot who had run aground on it many years before. Not much snow had fallen that winter, and the river water was unseasonably shallow. Everyone helped build a big bonfire and roasted hot dogs and marshmallows. The kids drank pop, and the adults drank campfire coffee.

In mid-afternoon, they headed back to the village. Bob's belongings were in the school entryway. During the last few months, he had given away or sold most of his things. All that remained was a moderate sized backpack that contained his clothing and a bedroll.

At 4:30 p.m., the 4:10 mail plane buzzed over the village. People began to congregate at the airstrip. Bob packed his gear over to the runway. Fred and Nancy were already at the parking apron, loading up their plane. They planned to leave by 6 p.m. The urban job picture still did not look promising; they expected that they would be back in the fall. They waved at Bob.

The crowd was unusually large, and Bob shook hands with everyone. All his high school students were there. They presented him with a coffee cup they had ordered. "Teachers never grow old, they only lose their class," it proclaimed. Everyone laughed.

The pilot called "All Aboard!" and Bob got into the plane. Sam's wife took a seat, too. She was going to town for a prenatal checkup.

The pilot yelled "All Clear!" and started the engine. He maneuvered around a soft spot on the apron and taxied down to the end of the runway. The plane lurched forward at the pull on the throttle and began roaring down the strip. Everyone was still clustered at the parking apron. Most waved wildly as the plane sped by. Inside the plane, Bob was waving, too.

The crowd began to disperse. Everyone made their way over to the Post Office to wait for the mail to be sorted. The afternoon plane connected with a flight from the city; it brought "better" mail. Sam was expecting a new propeller for his outboard motor. He had hit bottom so hard on a gravel bar that one prop blade had cracked off. He was grounded until the new prop arrived.

As everyone waited for their mail, Tony started teasing Sam about his river piloting prowess. "Maybe we'll have to name a gravel bar for you pretty soon," he quipped. Sam joined in the laughter. The children playing outside looked up and laughed, too. Then they continued their game of marbles.